

WASHINGTON, D.C. , Congressman John W. Olver (D-1st District) announced his strong opposition to the House-passed Head Start reauthorization bill. "Public money should not be used to discriminate in hiring," Olver said. "Head Start teachers should be hired on the basis of their qualifications, not their religious beliefs."

The House of Representatives today considered H.R. 2123, a bill which reauthorizes the Head Start program. Unfortunately, the House Republican leadership sought to dismantle the bipartisan spirit of the bill by inserting a religious discrimination amendment. A Head Start companion measure in the Senate does not include the faith-based language. A Senate companion bill also does not include the amendment. The religious discrimination amendment passed by a 220-196 vote today. Olver voted against the amendment.

Olver also voted today against the Head Start reauthorization bill as amended because it repealed existing provisions that prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion. Since its creation in 1965, Head Start has helped more than 22 million disadvantaged children by providing them with a quality early childhood education. Since 1972, agencies that receive government funding for Head Start , including religious organizations, have been prohibited from discriminating on the basis of religion. "Tens of thousands of at-risk children could lose their teachers not because those teachers are doing a bad job, but because of their religious beliefs," Olver said. "Head Start serves children and their families each year in urban and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. In Massachusetts, 13,011 children were enrolled in Head Start in FY04. Nationally, 905,851 children were enrolled in Head Start in FY04. The program has also been a ladder out of poverty for many disadvantaged parents who have become

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